

## *Now I've become a stranger in my own hometown*

### Representations of Home in the Diaries of Willy Cohn

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But this year has taken our home from us,  
old German Jews, the home for which we fought,  
and where we have not felt as guests!  
(Willy Cohn, December 31, 1933, p. 118)

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#### Abstract

*Willy Cohn describes in his diaries, published as *Kein Recht, nirgends. Tagebuch vom Untergang des Breslauer Judentums, 1933-1941* (2007), his alienation from his native Breslau during the Third Reich. This city, home to the third largest Jewish Community of the German Reich, offers an enlightening context by which to reflect upon how victims express, in written diaries, their feeling of estrangement. This sense of homelessness in Breslau becomes ever more outspoken due to the *völkisch* ideology and anti-Semitism. Shortly before Christmas 1938, for instance, Cohn expresses that he no longer belongs to the social fabric of the city and that he feels like an outsider in his own Heimat: "I went to the city! [...] I feel like a stranger in the inner city. People are everywhere, buying the last things for Christmas. We don't belong there anymore!"<sup>1</sup> This feeling of homelessness increases as anti-Semitic measures become worse. This contribution shows what it means to live in a city where Nazis have taken control: where could Cohn still find a place of refuge, what places would become important and feel like a kind of new "home"? How is Cohn's alienation from the city he used to love represented in his diaries? How do the changes in the urban environment influence his idea of "home"?*

#### Keywords:

Home – Diary – Willy Cohn – Breslau – Memory – Space

## Introduction

“Every night, when I went to sleep, I wondered whether it would be my last night in my own bed. Even in my own home I did not feel safe” (Arie Schnaper quoted in Isaacman 61). “For my parents, Breslau never became a real home” (Bubis 20). These two quotes, from Jewish victims who lived in Germany during Hitler’s reign, show that “home” is a difficult concept. Where could people find a sense of belonging, a secure place – in short, a place they could call home in a world deeply marked by conflict, persecution, and war? It is enlightening to reflect upon notions of home that underpin personal behavior, which is always influenced by other people and the social context in which people live. When this context becomes adverse, people behave differently, as they are confronted with confusing and difficult questions of belonging. Throughout history, the longing for home has continued amid recurring challenges of (non)-belonging.

When focusing on “home,” an explanation of this concept is first required, as much has been written about the notion (e.g. Jovanović 2011; Mallett 2004; Rapport and Dawson 1998; Finch and Hayes 1994; Somerville 1992/1989; Massey 1992; Douglas 1991; Wright 1991; Dovey 1985). Scientific literature shows that there are various ideas of home and that it is a complex and multidimensional concept.<sup>2</sup> The traditional theories regard home as a “stable physical centre of one’s universe – a safe and still place to leave and return to (whether house, village, region or nation)” (Rapport and Dawson 6). For Ahmed, Gurney, Somerville and others, however, home cannot simply be associated with house: “home and more particularly being at home is a matter, at least in part, of affect or feeling – as the presence or absence of particular feelings” (Mallett 79). Craig Gurney goes furthest, viewing home as an “ideological construct created from people’s emotionally charged experiences of where they happen to live” (26-29). For Mary Douglas (287-307), home is not just a theoretical construct, and not “an intangible entity, but always and foremost a specific space”. In Hobsbawm’s (63) words, home is defined as “an essentially private and individual routine, fantasy, memory, longing or presence”.

For this article, I would like to refer to home as a central refuge from an external and potentially threatening world, as a kind of “haven in a heartless world” (Hirsch 163). This definition seems particularly useful, and certainly in the context of the Holocaust, war and conflict. Home, in this specific context, will thus be considered “a specifically sentimentalized place,” the “environment (cognitive, affective, physical, somatic, or whatever) in which one best knows oneself, where one’s self-identity is best grounded” (also Rapport and Dawson 14, 16). In short: a place where people still experience a sense of belonging (Dovey

1).

This contribution aims to investigate these questions of home and belonging by using Willy Cohn's diaries *Kein Recht, nirgends. Tagebuch vom Untergang des Breslauer Judentums, 1933-1941* (2007) as a case study.<sup>3</sup> Cohn was a German-Jewish historian, teacher and diarist who was born in 1888 in Breslau (today Polish Wrocław). As an historian, he conducted a great deal of research and published most of his work. He is also known under the surname "Normannen-Cohn," a reference to his thesis "Geschichte der normannisch-sizilischen Flotte" of 1909 (Cohn x; Laqueur 261). Cohn, a German patriot who later became a convinced Zionist, is considered the foremost chronicler of Jewish life in Breslau; he wrote a diary from his youth until November 1941. Among the diaries from the years 1933–1941, only a few are missing. He is often compared to Victor Klemperer, who is regarded as the most significant recorder of the Jewish community in Dresden.<sup>4</sup> In 1941, Cohn still lived in Breslau with his second wife, Gertrud, called Trudi in his diaries, and his two youngest daughters, Susannchen and Tamara. In November of that year, the four of them were deported to Kaunas, in Lithuania, where they were shot (Friedla 6–7). Even though Cohn did not survive, his diaries bear witness to everyday Jewish life under the Nazi regime and grapple with notions like *Heimat*/home.

Cohn's diaries are now available at The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP). They made a long journey before being archived there. They were first kept and hidden by Else and Paul Zeitz in Berlin. Else was a relative of Ella Cohn Brienitzer, Cohn's first wife. The family Zeitz visited Cohn's home on October 26, 1941. It is possible that Cohn asked them during this visit to take his diaries if he and his family had to leave Breslau, as the diaries would be safer with an 'Aryan' (Paul Zeitz, was not Jewish). On November 15, 1941, when Cohn received a postcard with the announcement that he and the family had to leave their former hometown, he invited the Zeitzs to his home and gave them a box with 108 copybooks of the diaries, and the machine-printed 108 pages of his *Lebenserinnerungen*. The Zeitzs' home in Berlin was bombed during the war, but they succeeded in saving the diaries. After the war, they asked their son, who had become a British soldier, to find Cohn's family and inform them of the existence of his literary heritage. He contacted Cohn's sons, Wolfgang Louis Cohn and Ernst Abraham Cohn, both of whom were in the British army, in Belgium and Holland, respectively. They were unable to come to Berlin and take the diaries. Afterwards, Else and Paul Zeitz went to the United States and the diaries were

sent to a relative in England. Later, in 1960, when Ernst was studying in England, he retrieved the diaries and brought them to Israel.<sup>5</sup>

In the following, I will first focus on Cohn's native town of Breslau and on Silesia and Germany in general, as Cohn proudly considered himself a German Jew in the beginning. Memory is an important concept to address here, particularly in the context of Cohn's diary writings. Because one's sense of belonging is affected by questions of identity, and because Cohn became a convinced Zionist during the National Socialist reign, his trip to Palestine will be examined. Finally, I will focus on the last places where he felt "at home" in Breslau, namely, the synagogue, the cemetery, the library, his private house and nature and rural areas.

### **Home as a Space of Conflict: Germany, Silesia, Breslau**

While reading his diaries, it becomes clear that Willy Cohn always felt a deep connection with Germany in general and more specifically with his native city, Breslau, the capital of Silesia and Lower Silesia. Cohn was born and raised here; his parents had a shop in the city center; and here he learned his first words, made his earliest friends, and later had a good job. In short: it was the place where he belonged. Certainly before 1933, home, for Cohn, was "a word that evokes not only the particular place where one and one's family live, but the whole country" (Holy 128). During these years he traveled throughout Germany to give lectures on different topics such as Jewish history, the Jews in the Middle Ages, the Jews in Silesia, etc. He was able to continue his lectures until 1935. He visited Waldenburg, Oppeln, Trebnitz, Dresden, Ratibor and many other places. As the following diary entry shows, at the start of the German Reich he still sometimes felt secure and positive in Silesia:

I live an odd life now, I spend much time on trains. I know every train station in Silesia, every waiting hall, every announcer. *I feel at home everywhere*. I can think a lot and go within myself, and when I have to speak a lot at the venues where I give my lectures, I strive to be silent and alone with myself!<sup>6</sup>

As is clear from this quote from 1934, the feeling of home was still recurring for him, especially when he was able to make his trips (see also the section on nature and rural areas below).

Even though he felt deeply connected with his fatherland before the onset of the Third Reich, the change of feeling towards Germany starts with the rise of Hitler and culminates after the

‘Reichskristallnacht’ of 1938. Moment by moment, he becomes more and more alienated and no longer feels at home in his fatherland. Whereas Cohn used to be interested in everything that happened in Germany and wished to take part in actions in favor of Germany – for example, he fought for Germany in the First World War and earned the Iron Cross, something which he was extremely proud of – he is now aware of the fact that, because he is a Jew, he no longer belongs there. This is a devastating blow for him, as he expresses quite emotionally on April 13, 1933: “They remove us like an ingrown hair” (30). In other words, he has lost a major part of his sense of belonging. In his diaries, it is clear that this corresponds both to personal and to more general events.

The change in his sense of belonging and in his feelings towards Breslau and Germany comes about not only because he knows that the Jewish part of his identity has become undesired; it is also because of the massive changes in the urban environment of Breslau: the city has completely changed. There are swastikas everywhere, as well as martial music, *Hitlerjugend*, soldiers, SS, etc. Even well-known and familiar streets have suddenly become renamed, a change that Cohn notices repeatedly: “Today it is also in the newspaper that all the streets of Breslau, named after a Jew, are renamed, including Fraenckelplatz. Also a piece of the Jews’ fate.”<sup>7</sup> The observation of the city space is highly influenced by the transformation of the city, its toponyms, their erasing and their renaming. This renaming wipes away memory and leads to a physical and psychological disorientation (also Gargano 34–35). His idyllic representation of Breslau as his home is destroyed: “I was in Leedeborntrift with their new settlements. This was also my dream, but now I don’t want it in this country anymore. I have become a stranger here!”<sup>8</sup> In this respect, he even compares Germany to a “mouse trap”<sup>9</sup> (*Mausefalle*), a feeling that recurs for him now during the ‘Third Reich’ and that marks the opposite of “being at home”: “I feel as if sometimes, I were in a mouse trap, out of which I cannot escape.”<sup>10</sup> In short: Cohn feels trapped in both the city and country he once associated with home.

Cohn’s writings make clear that the public staging of National Socialist power is not only visual but also auditory. In this context, reference can be made to the beat of marching music, the roar of airplanes overflying the city, the widespread rumors, and the loudspeakers used for public indoctrination.<sup>11</sup> Stigmatizing verses against the Jews, such as “The farmer ploughs, the Jew lies” (*Der Bauer pflügt, der Jude lügt*) or “The bricklayer builds, the Jew steals” (*Der Maurer baut, der Jude klaut*)<sup>12</sup> are publicized and refer both to the general attitude that now prevails in the urban space and to the precariousness of the situation of the Jews. This altered soundscape also influences Cohn’s own self-understanding. Moreover, not only has the

place undergone massive changes, but the people now act differently. Sometimes he and his family are personally attacked. In this respect, he often refers to the fact that his children are bothered while on their way somewhere and that he now prefers to make walks in the late evening, as to be “sure not to meet any evil looks.”<sup>13</sup>

Because of these many changes, Cohn feels different. The fact that he does not feel welcome anymore is clearly expressed in his diaries and he even uses an intensification of the term in this context: first, he compares himself to a “guest”<sup>14</sup> and “stranger”<sup>15</sup>; later, he adds the term “unwelcome”<sup>16</sup> to guest and in 1938, after the ‘Reichskristallnacht’, he concludes that it feels as if he were a “criminal”<sup>17</sup> in his own hometown. Cohn also compares his native city to a ghost town: “Where are all the people who were once around? Sometimes you feel as if you were surrounded by loud shadows coming from the underworld”<sup>18</sup> and “[i]f you haven’t been in the city for a very long time during the darkening, it is very spooky.”<sup>19</sup> The Nazification of public space had tremendous impact on the individual’s sense of belonging: Cohn once felt associated with his environment, but this changes into an alienating environment where his self-identity is not grounded anymore. All these examples indicate that Cohn no longer feels at home. The city has become a place that is no longer accessible to him; it feels as if he does not belong there anymore. This is a key reason why he strengthens his Zionist ideals over the years.

### **Home and Memory: Cohn and his Writings**

Sometimes, Cohn’s diaries can be very confusing, as with the following entries: “I still very much love Germany”<sup>20</sup>; “[y]esterday the children were bothered while skiing, Ruth was beaten; the children want to get out. [...] Despite all this, I still feel attached to Germany”<sup>21</sup>; “I just adhere with every fiber to the Silesian *Heimat*, even if I cannot be glad of this homeland like I used to be”<sup>22</sup>; “[i]n the afternoon I eagerly compiled material for the article ‘Breslau’; it makes me feel quite happy; it is my native city, after all.”<sup>23</sup> Even though Cohn is saddened by the fact that what German Jews have done for the fatherland is now considered worthless, he is still rooted in German culture. He teaches German literature in school and often refers to Goethe, an icon of German cultural history. It is because he feels so intensely connected with German culture that there are countless pages with such quotes. The worship of Goethe even goes so far that on his mother’s gravestone, in the Jewish cemetery, there is a quote from Goethe,<sup>24</sup> which symbolizes the German-

Jewish symbiosis.

Thus, even though Cohn feels ever more like an outsider in his own *Heimat* – “homeless at home” (Jansen 85-109) – he cannot let go of his ‘love’ for his native country and still longs for his old hometown; there is a kind of challenge of (non-)belonging.<sup>25</sup> This inner division (*Zerrissenheit*) stands out remarkably, as seen in this ambiguous diary entry:

When we, Jews, go through the landscape in these times, we do so with a very peculiar feeling. On the one hand, it is the country in which I was born and whose development I have pursued through decades; on the other hand, we are turned away from it and have been alienated. We are all alone. But the walk was very nice, and I tried to push all that away.<sup>26</sup>

It is evident that Cohn looks at his hometown in an ambivalent way. Because of the National Socialist terror, he is grappling with complex feelings and regards his native city with contradictory feelings of longing and disgust.

It becomes clear that Cohn is firmly rooted in the past – he even uses the word “transplant”<sup>27</sup> (*verpflanzen*), which indicates that he feels strongly rooted in Germany – and that home is associated with origin, or as Kimberly Dovey states: “The home environment is one thoroughly imbued with the familiarity of past experience. It is the environment we inhabit day after day until it becomes taken for granted and is unselfconscious” (3). The diarist still feels partially connected to his native town and country. It is clear that there remain connections with Breslau and Germany that have grown during the years he was there, or as Dovey states: “Home is a place where our identity is continually evoked through connections with the past. [...] The role of the physical environment in this regard is that of a kind of mnemonic anchor” (8). That a certain place can have a mnemonic function is illustrated in the following entry: “I always go back through the Dom- and Sandinsel; I am always happy to see the image of old culture. In the end, I stand at the Schmiedebrücke in front of the stamp shop of Kretschmer with longing eyes as I have done for 40 years. On revient toujours...”<sup>28</sup>

This diary entry shows the extent to which the idea of “home” had taken root in Cohn’s mind and heart. Because he is so anchored in the past, it is not easy to adjust this notion: “Social hierarchy, injustice, and outmoded sex roles are difficult to question when they are embodied in, and evoked by, the taken-for-granted world of spatial patterning” (Dovey 5). This entry also demonstrates that the concept “home” is something that cannot only be deeply rooted in someone, but also brings together memory and longing.

The memories of the past transform his present experiences and feelings and, in the following cases, are notably nostalgic and sentimental:

Yesterday morning I first worked for me, then went with Trudi to Scheitnig; it was very nice and relaxing; we especially went to the old part; we stood at the Schiller Monument; I admired his magnificent face; there is still a noble German character. How beautiful is the Eichendorff monument in the park.<sup>29</sup>

Yesterday morning I had a few happy hours and dictated a large part of my memories; I am writing of the first summer in Hohndorf at the forester, who has given me a lot because of his connection with nature. Today I really live from memories of past times.<sup>30</sup>

When standing before the monuments of Friedrich Schiller and Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, critically important writers in German literary history and key parts of the nation's collective identity, he is reminded of the "good old times," the times that represent true German culture for him, with which he identifies himself and with which he feels associated. However, when he is no longer able to connect these memories in a meaningful way with the current situation, he questions the stability of both his identity and sense of belonging (Neumann 337).

It stands out that in Cohn's diaries, "there is widespread nostalgia for a condition of being 'at home' in society, with oneself, and with the universe: for homes of the past that were socially homogeneous, communal, peaceful, safe and secure" (Rapport and Dawson 31). In fact, Cohn prefers reading his old diaries from before the 'Third Reich' and dictates his memories by using these earlier writings instead of being confronted with the alienating circumstances of everyday life: "For tea, grandmother Proskauer and Reiters were there; I read a piece from my memories; it is better than the conversations about the same things always."<sup>31</sup> This entry illustrates how the past becomes highly important for people whose perspective on the present is unusually unstable (Ganguly 29-30) and that nostalgia can be considered as a synonym for the sense of homelessness Cohn experiences. These specific writings, his memoirs, represent his home, namely, his intellectual home. When he writes about Breslau and Germany, it is clear that he often does so by using mental images – sometimes, memories occur to him that seem to emerge from another planet – he writes about what his *Heimat* used to be like and where he used to feel at home. He creates an alternative kind of home, an imagined city. It is particularly this imagined home that is an important space of refuge from the threatening outside world. In writing his *Lebenserinnerungen*, he is able to construct a home in his

narratives. Salman Rushdie (10), in writing about the role of history and memory in narratives of “home,” suggests that “writing about one’s homeland implies imagining it, or writing about the homeland of one’s mind” (see also Jovanović 47). One writes, as Strauss (103) puts it, “in order gradually to create for oneself an intellectual home (*eine geistige Heimat*).”

Not only writing but also literature in general becomes important to Cohn. When writing about his situation and feelings, Cohn often falls back on literature to express how he feels: “Today is the birthday of the Third Reich: seven years. I have to think of the ‘Archibald Douglas’ of Fontane.”<sup>32</sup> Archibald Douglas is the principal personage of the eponymous ballad (1854), written by the German writer Theodor Fontane. This ballad portrays the indelible love the exiled hero holds for his Scottish homeland,<sup>33</sup> a situation that corresponds with that of Cohn.

### **Home and Nation: *Erez Israel***

The sense of belonging is affected by questions of identity. This certainly applies for Willy Cohn. One could say that Cohn has a hybrid identity, or *Bindestrichidentität*, as it is termed in German: on one hand, he feels connected to Germany; on the other hand – and certainly because of the anti-Semitic policy in Germany – he strengthens his Zionist ideals. He truly feels both German and Jew: both parts mark his identity, which he tries to combine:

He [my former pupil Feibusch] feels very connected to European and especially German culture; I told him that if he had children here [in Palestine], the transformation would go much faster. We should keep the good from the old culture area, but we would have to become a people here [Palestine] because of our existing culture.<sup>34</sup>

It is exactly the second part of his identity, his Jewish identity, that makes him feel connected to Israel, which was still Mandate Palestine at the time. In the beginning of the 1930’s, Cohn was already able to save his two oldest children,<sup>35</sup> Wölfl and Ernst, by sending them respectively to Paris and Palestine, the latter referred to as *Erez Israel* in his writings. In 1937, he and his wife travel to Palestine to visit Ernst and to investigate the possibilities of them moving there.

While still in Breslau, before even having planned his trip to Palestine, Cohn expresses his feelings of longing<sup>36</sup> for the Promised Land of *Erez Israel*, which he considers the home for the Jewish people,<sup>37</sup> the place where they truly belong. He sees there a future for his children and for the Jewish nation: “Ruth now often tells how she gets harassed on the way to the sports field on the Trentinstraße. These are the people among whom she must grow up. If I could, I would now already send the child to *Erez Israel* for further education.”<sup>38</sup> He also writes, “One now often thinks of Palestine, but surely, if one were there, one would perhaps long for Germany! That is our Jewish fate [...]”<sup>39</sup> With regard to the latter quote, one could ask how Cohn’s Zionism can be reconciled with his German patriotism. This indeed relates to his hybrid identity and to the fact that he still feels rooted in German culture (see also above). Cohn parallelizes Zionism and National Socialism and sees certain things from a Jewish perspective. He writes, for example, that the National Socialists strive for living space (*Lebensraum*) and that this is also the main objective of the Zionists, who consider Palestine as their living space.<sup>40</sup>

When Cohn finally succeeds in planning their trip and leaving with Trudi, the joy and gratitude<sup>41</sup> can be derived from his sentences: “it is the dream of life that is fulfilled”<sup>42</sup> and “Frau Landau made a farewell visit to us; will I be sitting in this room again? I am so glad that I am allowed to see my children and *our* country.”<sup>43</sup> When writing about *Erez Israel*, he often uses the collective pronouns “us” and “our,” as in the aforementioned sentence, indicating that he feels deeply connected to this country. In March and April 1937, Cohn and Trudi made their long-awaited trip to Palestine. After stopping in Paris, where they visited their son Wölfl, they went to Marseille by train, where they boarded the *Mariette Pascha* on March 18, 1937. This journey was a powerful experience for Cohn: on board, he had conversations with many people about Jewish questions, such as the future of *Erez Israel* and how to build it.<sup>44</sup> He describes that he feels the most comfortable among these persons who are working to ensure the future of “our people.”<sup>45</sup> Before arriving in Haifa, Cohn passes by various interesting places – including Malta, Alexandria and Port Said – places he had read about and could now see in reality. In speaking about “connection” or sense of belonging, it should be noted that while aboard the ship, Cohn remarks that a coffin is being transported, about which he writes that it is “probably a dead person, who *goes home* to *Erez Israel*.”<sup>46</sup> Here, he even states that the deceased person is returning home, to the “land of Jews” (*Judenland*).<sup>47</sup> For Cohn, it is clear that there is a link between the concept of home and Palestine for the Jewish nation. It is a fairly conventional Zionist attitude. It is the place that could be a new home, a place where he belongs. His feelings upon first seeing

and entering *Erez Israel* are expressed in a very touching way:

Maybe it is the entrance to a new life. Slowly, the ship steers to the port [...] With Ernst, I went to the synagogue of Dr. Elk, a former rabbi in Stettin, a large semi-underground hall. Very crowded: First evening *Pessach* with a beautiful service, quite conservative. Congregational singing! What feelings did I have to face: I was close to tears. *Pessach* in *Erez Israel*. Many friends. [...] Because I was very exhausted, I was unable to go to a *seder* evening, I went to bed. It may be that the people for whom *Erez Israel* is daily life lose their verve. Very close to us, there is the Technikum, the Realschule. Only Jews, when I look down to the balcony, I see in some streets real people going to the synagogue with *talles* and prayer books. Around Haifa goes an *Erinn* and there you can carry! Sun outside. We are in *Erez Israel!* [...] Nice room with balcony. It seems quite incomprehensible to me that Jews have done everything in such a short space of time, and that is why it should not to be measured with the scale of how it still can be. This is at all the only possible conception, one has to work, but not carp.<sup>48</sup>

The deep emotional feeling of seeing Palestine for the first time is captivating for Cohn. He even makes liberal use of exclamation marks to emphasize his gratitude and joy.

Most of the time, Cohn and Trudi stayed in Giwath Brenner, where their son lived in a kibbutz. They also made trips to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Tiberias and Nazareth. These trips and the whole journey in general left a deep impression on Cohn. In the context of his trip, he refers once again to a literary text to express his feelings: “In me it is full of solemn feelings on this journey, such a mood as expressed by Walther von der Vogelweide in his belief in the crusade song.”<sup>49</sup> Walter von der Vogelweide was the best-known “among the many medieval German lyric poets (minnesingers) of the courtly culture flourishing in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries”<sup>50</sup>; among other things, he was known for his religious *Palästinalied*, which describes how it feels to see “the holy land.” In addition, when writing about Palestine, Cohn mostly uses positive nouns and adjectives, such as “the aim of my wishes” (*Ziel meiner Wünsche*),<sup>51</sup> “heavenly” (*paradiesisch*),<sup>52</sup> “life fulfillment” (*Lebenserfüllung*),<sup>53</sup> and “the land of our longing” (*das Land unserer Sehnsucht*).<sup>54</sup> When walking around in Palestine, Cohn is delighted to see that many women are pregnant, which shows him that the people of Israel is alive (*das Volk Israel lebt*).<sup>55</sup> The fact that there are many youths<sup>56</sup> in Cohn’s *Erez Israel* gives him more and more faith in a bright future and home for the Jewish nation:

[...] then I went with Ernst to the beautiful city park [...] There was an abundance of children who

spoke Hebrew with perfect confidence. [...] When one sees the numerous children, one is completely reassured about the future of our people; they will already be able to manage it, where we elderly people cannot afford so much anymore.<sup>57</sup>

A young couple was sitting on a bench, two beautiful people, tan because of the sun, the sun was playing on the lovely thighs of the girl, she had laid her head on his lap, he was reading and blowing away the flies; a beautiful image of luck.<sup>58</sup>

The diarist is also optimistic about the Hebrew language and his own prospects for learning it: “In the park today, I have read and translated a piece from the newspaper with Ernst. I think I would be able to master the language relatively quickly.”<sup>59</sup>

When Cohn becomes aware that his stay is only temporary and that he will have to leave Palestine in two weeks – the last day of his trip was April 28, 1937 – he becomes melancholic in thinking about it. He decides to spend his time and energy not only on his writing, but also on visiting many places in his “homeland.” This strengthens in him the feelings of belonging.<sup>60</sup> He writes that during his visit to the Old City of Jerusalem, “When I was in the Jewish quarter, I experienced a feeling of home [*Heimatgefühl*]. Hebrew was heard again instead of the Arabic sounds.”<sup>61</sup> When going through the small alleys of the Old City, they eventually arrive at the Wailing Wall. As Cohn stands before the limestone, he is deeply moved: “Certainly, the exterior view with the beggars is not pleasant, but the stones speak of *our* history.”<sup>62</sup> This specific place is connected with cultural memory. The fact that he feels at home can be gathered from the following: one afternoon, a group of tourists arrives in Giwath Brenner, and he gives them a guided tour, noting afterwards that “I can do this as well as an old resident of Giwath Brenner.”<sup>63</sup> Cohn feels deeply connected<sup>64</sup> in Palestine, to the extent that it will be difficult for him to leave “this glorious and fertile land, in which I would really like to stay.”<sup>65</sup> He even prays to God that he will be able to return to the country and help to (re)build everything.

Gradually, however, Cohn remarks that not everything is as he had imagined it, that Palestine does not completely correspond to what he had expected. In this context, some people talk about negative experiences<sup>66</sup>:

A Breslau woman, Mrs. Borger, who is working for the *Machsas* here, overcame Trudi and myself with all sorts of negativity, e.g., that the young people do not take too much interest in the affairs of the

community; it seems to me that these are only the stages of development which must be passed through.<sup>67</sup>

Not everyone he encounters speaks Hebrew fluently,<sup>68</sup> and he remarks that there are still many differences in the Jewish nation, not least the differences between Eastern and Western Jews.<sup>69</sup> After going for a walk in the neighborhood *Mea Schearim*, he describes that his craving for *Erez Israel* has actually become less strong:

In the afternoon [...] [I went to] to the *Konditorei* of Siedner, this is the same company that we have in Breslau. In the small area, there was a completely German-Jewish milieu. No word in Hebrew! *My longing for Jewish Palestine was cured* by the fact that we went through the *Schuk* of the old *Jischuns* (insertion: in the district “Mea Schearim.” Mea Schearim is a self-contained district of Jews who emigrated from the Old City years ago), picturesque figures. We also passed the Talmud-Torah school Mea Shearim, I went up there and saw and heard the people learn Gemorah. With all the emotional attitude, it is nevertheless *a strange world* to us! [...] In the old *Jischun*, many venerable figures are seen with a white beard. The boys with the earlocks look *alien*. [...] It still seems to me as a miracle that I am in Jerusalem! Of course, you carry a Jerusalem in the heart, which is not that of modern districts. But of course that is not possible anymore after two thousand years, and we cannot take offense at the fact that our architectural style is not the same as it used to be.<sup>70</sup>

Even though, as in the preceding quotes, he always tries to add a positive image at the end of a critical observation, his dream and image of a peaceful and heavenly home in Palestine become disturbed by aspects he cannot control. On one hand, he experiences that it will be almost impossible to make a living there: “He [Professor Julius Guttmann] does not see material prospects for me either, but he understands the reasons for which I want *Aliyah*.”<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, life in Cohn’s *Erez Israel* does not suit his wife: firstly, Trudi cannot stand the weather<sup>72</sup> (in March, it is already quite hot); secondly, she does not feel well among the people there and she does not want to live unhappily.<sup>73</sup> Cohn had anticipated and feared this, as he writes in his diary on April 2, 1937:

Then I made a small tour with Trudi through the farm. We discussed the problems of (re)development and also our personal future. But I don’t think that Trudi will be able to decide to move to Giwath Brenner. The climate also does not please her. Our whole attitude to things is completely different; Trudi cannot understand my somewhat romantic vision and sees everything much

more soberly, sometimes that hurts me, but I don't see any possibility to change it. (403)

Three days later, on April 5, his supposition is borne out:

I had an exchange of ideas with her [Trudi], from her it was clear that she does not want to go to Giwath Brenner, so a dream of my life gets ruined. I cannot fight anymore! I had already imagined myself here, even though I also clearly felt the resistance. [...] Dear G'tt, let me pass through this well, and it's such a beautiful country! (407)

From this moment, it is clear to Cohn that he will not be able to stay in Palestine, the place he sees as a home for himself and the whole Jewish nation. He knows that he will have to return to Germany, and writes the following: "I decided today for myself, when G'tt gives me the strength, to write a book about this journey. I will write down my impressions, no objective events."<sup>74</sup> This entry is another indication that writing plays a key role in Cohn's life. When he cannot stay in his *Erez Israel*, he tries to create one in his writings, a cognitive home. The reader of the diaries also experiences this when Cohn has returned to Breslau:

Yesterday afternoon I once again felt exceedingly bad for the first time [since I have returned to Breslau]; all the unpleasant grievances arose, of which I had noticed nothing in Erez Israel. [...] I started working through my travel diary; one experiences it all again! [...] I had to tell both [Czollak and Rabbi Gold] of Palestine. It is always fun to do so, when you are so filled with everything.<sup>75</sup>

By rereading his own writings<sup>76</sup> and telling about his time in his "Beloved Land," he experiences it all again, and it stands out that he finds a refuge in this imagined space. In Germany, he still thinks of *Erez Israel*, because – though not everything was as he had imagined it – his greatest joy would be to have his family there.<sup>77</sup> After the 'Reichskristallnacht', he states that if he had to leave Germany, Israel would be the only option: "I am very tired. Certainly I would be happy if I could save my whole family, but myself? Can I still be transplanted anywhere but to *Erez Israel*?"<sup>78</sup>

### **Home and Specific Places: Synagogue, Cemetery, Library, Private House**

Power relations are often negotiated through and embedded in space. With Hitler's coming to power in January 1933, space became reproduced and reshaped continuously and played an active role in

segregation and destruction. The distinction between ‘Aryan’ and ‘Jew’ in the ‘Third Reich’ was structured in, and through, space: Jews were dismissed from their jobs and were not allowed to travel, attend schools, visit swimming pools, or go to libraries; they were restricted from going to shops and could do so only at specific times. Through these and other measures they were essentially barred from public life; their life became reduced and restricted to the limited number of places they could visit. In reading Cohn’s diaries, it becomes clear that particular spaces are endowed with specific emotions. Concrete places such as the synagogue, cemeteries, the library, parks and rural areas mark important identity-defining points of reference for him (see also Ernst 106). When Cohn is no longer welcome in the city center, he begins visiting the previously noted places more frequently. They even feel like a kind of “home” to him, places where he retains a feeling of belonging, as will be shown by a close reading of the diaries.

### ***Synagogue***

For Cohn and the other Jews of Breslau, the synagogue remains one of the typical Jewish places they are still able to visit. Cohn sees this as a need through which he can mull things over and contemplate. He feels at ease there, it is – most of the time – a sort of haven or refuge (Moore 1984). He even compares the services to family gatherings: “Yesterday afternoon we were all together, including the father-in-law, at the *Simchath Thorah* celebration in the Abraham Mugdan Synagogue; it was very nice as a big family celebration.”<sup>79</sup> In this way, the synagogue becomes a kind of home: it is the environment where he belongs, where he can ‘relax’ and come to terms with himself. The synagogue also represents intergenerational Jewish memory, for it is a specifically sentimentalized place: “I stood with Ruth at the old places we used to have, and I showed Ruth the places that my father showed me over thirty years ago. This is how generations come and go. I also would like to show it Susannchen at the same place.”<sup>80</sup>

In reading the diaries, I wondered if it was really the synagogue itself, the fixed place, that represents “home” for Cohn. During the years 1933–1941, Cohn attends religious services at no fewer than four different places.<sup>81</sup> In the beginning, he always goes to the Abraham Mugdan Synagogue, at the Rhedigerplatz, not far from his apartment. Before 1938, he also sometimes went to the *Neue Synagoge*, which has now been destroyed during ‘Reichskristallnacht’ in November. He continues visiting the Abraham Mugdan Synagogue until July 25, 1940, when he has a fight with a young man called Scheye. The box on the ears that Cohn gives him has far-reaching consequences: reconciliation proceedings start and from this

moment on, Cohn no longer visits this synagogue; instead, he now attends services at the Beate Guttman Heim, an old-age home. In May 1941, however, there is mention that this building is to be taken over by the military, a measure that touches Cohn sharply: “It really hurt me that it was the last time I could pray there, and do not know yet, where I will go next time. But we are able to find the way to our G’tt everywhere.”<sup>82</sup> With regard to this diary entry, I would argue that it is not only the place itself that functions as a home; more specifically, it is also the traditional religious rituals, which Cohn has known since he was a child and in which he feels at home: these practices transform the place into a home. Thus, for Cohn, home is “grounded less in a place and more in the activity that occurs in the place” (Jackson 148), or as Dovey (5) states<sup>83</sup>: “People who are thoroughly immersed in an activity that they love can convey a sense of home to that place. Thus home may be the relationship between a cook and a kitchen, [...] a sports person and a playing field. [...] the place is elevated into a home by virtue of allowing such homelike activities to take place.”

In the end of 1941, Cohn begins visiting the Storch Synagogue, the only synagogue in the city not destroyed in the war that can still be visited today. When Cohn cannot attend religious services, he prays at home (see also the section about the private house). The fact that he regards the synagogue as a kind of home is also linked with Jewish traditions: Cohn feels deeply connected with the Jewish religion, and reading the Torah gives him strength for instance. This is why he seeks out synagogues when he makes his trips around Germany or when he is in Palestine: “In these synagogues of *Jeruschalajim*, I find a special mood. Not all are beautiful, what we call beautiful in an artistic way; but they are places of Jewish prayer, places of *our* faith.”<sup>84</sup> One could say that he comes home in his faith.

### ***Cemetery***

The cemetery, like the synagogue, is a typical Jewish space, and is similarly important to Cohn. In Nazi Germany, cemeteries were seen as one of the last spaces where German Jews could conduct open-air activities (see also Borut 349; Bar-Levav 53–68) and find a refuge:

The Führer is coming today. Wonderful weather [...] In order to avoid it all I am today at the place where Jews are really wanted – the Lohestrasse cemetery – in order to have another wordless conversation with my father; it was very peaceful outside, and you could lie in the sun and sit down.<sup>85</sup>

Previously, the children had played in the streets and in the parks. Now, however, they can do so only in the cemeteries:

With Susannchen, I went to the cemetery Lohestraße. During *Ellul* it is a special duty to visit the graves of loved ones, and outside, I have prayed for all. The walk moved me considerably. Susannchen searched thoroughly for chestnuts; in the past, I would not have allowed it in the cemetery, but the children now have so few pleasures that one is glad if one can still offer them something.<sup>86</sup>

The cemetery is also represented as a refuge, a kind of “haven in a heartless world” (Hirsch 163). But, as I discussed in the first part, on Germany and Breslau, the concept “home” can undergo alteration. This also applies to the cemetery. Until 1941, these sites were described in the diaries as a harmonious, nonviolent place, but by March 1941 this changes: Cohn remarks that, with a military hospital now next to the cemetery, the soldiers throw rubbish into the holy place of the Jews:

I went to the cemetery. [...] I really felt the need to be there, after the annual mass of my father. The Menzel Schule is now lazaret. The soldiers throw all their rubbish onto the cemetery, so I had to remove a piece of comb and orange rind from the family grave. Respect for the deceased!<sup>87</sup>

This underscores that the concept of home is not something stable. It is increasingly difficult for Cohn to find a place to call home, or as Augé states (quoted in Rapport and Dawson 6): “no place is completely itself and separate, and no place is completely other (cf. Massey 1991, 1992). And in this situation, people are always and yet never ‘at home’ [...]”

### ***Library***

As noted in the introduction, Cohn was both a teacher and an historian. For his scientific research, he needed a library. This was not just to look up information for his articles, lectures, etc; he also greatly enjoyed reading and finding more information on particular topics; he preferred being in a scientific atmosphere. Furthermore, he adds that working, writing and science are always the best distraction.<sup>88</sup> In short: in a scientific environment<sup>89</sup>, he felt at home. Unfortunately, because Jews were being increasingly segregated from the rest of society, they were barred from using the library from 1939 onwards. This was a shock to Cohn, for in losing the library he also lost a kind of home. He mentions that it will be especially hard for him to live without the library<sup>90</sup> and that “I always miss something, when I can’t go there.”<sup>91</sup>

However, Cohn is fortunate to be able to continue his work in the *Domarchiv* (diocese archives) through informal contacts, from June 1939 until his deportation in November 1941. The fact that he is able to continue one of the most important things in his life, namely being in a scientific environment and doing scientific work, makes him feel at home in the church library and archives: “I went to the Domarchiv, where I now have the permission to work for the Germania Judaica. I was very nicely received by Professor Nowack, the director of the diocesan archives [...] How happy I felt once again in a scientific atmosphere.”<sup>92</sup> Max Corden writes that these diocese archives became “his second home” (30). Cohn even states that the library functions as a literal “refuge”<sup>93</sup> for him, compared to the alienating world. A particularly notable indication that he feels at ease in this specific place is that one day, when it has been raining, Cohn even puts on straw shoes there so that his other shoes can dry.<sup>94</sup>

There is clearly a tension between the inside – peaceful – world of the library and the outside – threatening – world of the city. But even here, it should be noted, not everyone welcomes Cohn. A nun called Mater Huberta often talks about him behind his back and does not want him in the library and church archives, because she fears that having a Jew there could be dangerous. She never says any of this to him directly, but Cohn knows about it thanks to another sister, Mater Innocentia, who allows him to the library. He also intuitively feels that the former is not to be trusted: “I take care when I am with Mater Huberta, as Mater Innocentia told me how much she distorts everything. The former is a quite false person, and it is unpleasant to have to work with such a person in a room, but outwardly she is of great amiability.”<sup>95</sup> Even though Cohn feels at home in the library, this sense of belonging is hampered because of Mater Huberta. This shows once again that the concept of “home” is complex, especially when one is living in a world marked by conflict. Yet, despite this person who sometimes seems to hinder Cohn, it does not deeply affect his sense of being in the library, because, as he remarks, “in these eight years, we have already experienced a lot.”<sup>96</sup> He knows that it is harsh to live in such circumstances; indeed, reminding himself that they have already gone through trying times and that things could be worse is a psychological tactic he uses to put everything into perspective and which helps him to keep his spirits up. As stated in the introduction, when talking about home, there must be a relationship between people and their environment, a sense of belonging. This is certainly the case here:

Mater Huberta, of course, was very agitated; as so often. I always have the feeling that she will not rest until she has taken away my employment there. Today she said that *we* got a very dangerous neighbor;

it is only about the fact that in front of *us*, there are now a *Sicherheits-* and *Hilfsdienst*, as in many parts of the city.<sup>97</sup>

Cohn uses here the collective “we” and “in front of us” instead of “in front of the archive.” This indicates that he truly feels at home there, that it is the place where he belongs.

### ***Private House***

In English, the word home can also indicate the private sphere, and this is why Cohn’s house is central to this part. The following are typical sentences in his diaries: “In my cot I am happiest”<sup>98</sup>; “I prefer to stay in my room until G’tt decides to call me”<sup>99</sup>; “We also always pray that we can keep our private home, it is the last thing that makes life bearable for us.”<sup>100</sup> In the end, the Jewish population has almost no choice but to retreat into the private sphere. In this context, one’s own home becomes highly important. It is one of the last places where one feels safe and where normality is maintained, although in the context of persecution this should also be relativized.

The apartment at Opitzstraße 28 is one of the last places where Cohn is still able to continue his life in a normal way. It provides a sense of place and belonging in an increasingly alienating world (see also Mallett 66). It is where he lives with his wife and two youngest daughters; it is where he has his own personal library, of which he is especially proud, and where he can pray when he cannot go to the synagogue. In short, it is the environment where he belongs. Even though Cohn’s apartment is a confined space – sometimes he and his family use only two rooms, for heating reasons – this enclosed domain represents a comfortable and secure space for him, opposite to the outside world, which is considered a dangerous, alienating space (see also Dovey 1985 and Mallett 71). In this context, his apartment becomes a safe haven: “The home becomes the sole area of personal control and security, [...] Shut off from this world the home has become an isolated world unto itself, a cocoon of security and comfort severed from its deeper connections with the urban fabric.” (Dovey 19).

In their private home, the family always tries to keep everything as normal as possible. They constantly adapt their home to changing social circumstances (ibid. 5). Thus, Cohn and his wife strive to create a uniform image inside the apartment by living as they had before and by hiding any sign of Nazification that might indicate a relationship with the outside world (Hirsch 174). Every Friday evening, they have *Freitagabendbrot* for Shabbath. Likewise, Cohn continues to write articles at home, the family still

celebrates birthdays for the children as they had done previously for the other siblings, etc. Behind the walls of the apartment arises their own world:

Yesterday morning, Susannchen was very happy with her birthday table; she has got various beautiful presents, in the afternoon there were also some children, it was a real children's society, as we always prepared it for all children, and we were glad that we were also able to do it for this child.<sup>101</sup>

They also continue traditional Jewish celebrations, including *Sukkoth* and *Chanukkah*: "In the afternoon we had *Chanukkaeinbescherung* for Susanne and Tamara; the dining table was divided into two halves, and Trudi had built up everything beautifully for the children, just as we did for the older ones."<sup>102</sup> By continuing such practices and by including routinized activities and cyclical events such as birthday celebrations, they transform their apartment into a real home (Saile 1985; Mallett 79-80; see also Despres 1991: 101; Dovey 1985; and Korosec-Serfaty 1985). A reproduction of everyday life is typical for situations of fundamental change: it can be considered as one of the last holds in one's life (Beck 13).

However, it should be noted here that from 1938 onwards, the private sphere is not so private anymore. During the 'Reichskristallnacht' for instance, even one's own home was no longer a shelter: the men who were at home at that time were arrested and deported to Buchenwald. From 1939 onwards, it was no longer a matter of someone possessing their own house, as many Jews were more and more concentrated in the same area and had to live in *Judenhäuser* (Miron 129). Moreover, the houses of the last Jewish inhabitants of Breslau who were able to keep their own houses were marked with white stars on the doors (Wolff 61). In this way it became explicitly clear where the Jews lived and which regions of the city were to be avoided. This is an important aspect in National Socialist politics of the broader process of constructing the 'Jew' in and through space (cf. Cole 271). Such 'Jewish places' were regarded as threatening spaces and led to the concretization of anti-Semitic perceptions (cf. Cole 266).

Cohn did not live in a *Judenhaus*, but he notes that in 1941, many Jews had to leave their houses or apartments and were sent away.<sup>103</sup> Cohn fears that he also will lose his dwelling: "Yesterday, two different people have looked at our house and we may lose it any day."<sup>104</sup> This prediction comes true in early November 1941, shortly before he is deported: "On my way there [to his landlord], I already had the feeling that unpleasant news awaited me. He told me that my apartment had been assigned to a government inspector from Liegnitz. The latter would already like to move in on the first of December."<sup>105</sup> This moment would surely have been extremely harsh for Cohn: his private dwelling was the last place where he could

find a refuge. From this moment on, Cohn becomes “homeless at home.” On November 21, he is arrested with his family; four days later, he is deported to Kaunas, Lithuania.

It can be summarized that the world of the Jews became ever smaller during this time, until even one’s own house no longer functioned as a space of refuge. This also gives an indication about the sense of belonging that is henceforth completely lost. Here, one sees a clear shrinkage of their world: first, Jews were no longer allowed to enter the city; then the cities shrank to some (Jewish) places; these remaining places shrank to their houses, until they had nothing left and were forced into a cramped train car for deportation.

### ***Home and Nature***

Whereas the urban environment is completely estranging for Cohn, this is less the case for the rural areas and nature. These places have not been nazified in the same way as has been the case with cities. Nature is resilient, and in these areas Cohn still finds elements that remind him of the past. We can note a “turn to nature”: he sometimes takes walks or trips to these areas.

We drove to Oswitz, then to the Schwedenschanze and walked back through the forest. I have not been outside for a long time. [...] From the ring on, this was a trip to an unknown country for Susanne, too, and I explained everything to her. [...] It was the first time the child has heard the cuckoo calling and has seen a black and white head of cattle in nature from close up, also the horses in the stable. Of course, these are all great experiences!<sup>106</sup>

We had a very nice walk, and it was very pleasant that we were alone for once. [...] We have once again seen fields, already ripening corn, picked flowers, looking at the places where I spent my youth. [...] I just cling to this Silesian homeland with every fiber, even if it does not make me that happy anymore. Outside, it is quite peaceful, nor is it painted on any bench that it is forbidden to Jews. I see many satisfied people on the water. Some have even taken a gramophone with them, which is less my taste.<sup>107</sup>

This image of rural areas completely runs counter to Cohn’s descriptions of the city, where banks now display signs that they are “forbidden for Jews,”<sup>108</sup> and where swastika flags, the German eagle, loudspeakers, military displays, triumphal music and the pageantry of Nazi gatherings have become common (see also Lee and Wilke 38). Two other examples:

We [Cohn and Trudi] came through Schwoitsch, where I often was on school trips with classes, last year even with Ruth and Susanne. [...] Many military people are in the village around Breslau and are waiting for a new assignment! The harvest is also going on everywhere. The country looks so peaceful and clean, yet it is in such a terrible war. This car trip was good for both of us, with the new impressions. I love the Silesian country very much.<sup>109</sup>

Early, I made the promised trip with Trudi and Susanne [...]. Nobody bothered us; on the way back, the girls plucked flowers. Susannchen also observed plowing for the first time; a boy was making his first experiments. How I would like to give my children a peaceful life in agriculture, the return to the soil.<sup>110</sup>

In the city, people seem to have lost their minds; in the rural areas, however, nature does not seem to notice the affairs of society. Nature is typically described as something unaffected, peaceful (*friedlich*) and quiet, relaxing (*ausruhend*). It is a sort of “timeless reality, immune from the traumas of history,” a place of “lawlessness and enchantment” (Lee and Wilke 21, 23). In this respect, Cohn even remarks: “*Medicus curat, natura sanat.*”<sup>111</sup> Likewise, when he makes his trip to Israel, he looks for nature: “I smelled the hay of our country. [...]; when you’re going alone through the fields, you can best sink in your thoughts, [...].”<sup>112</sup>;

and:

Right now, I am sitting in the garden in front of *Tarbuthsrif*, my favorite place. There is a certain Shabbath mood over the camp. It is very nice that it is noiseless here. Next to this little garden is a small forest, with coniferous trees, that will surely be big and strong in twenty years.<sup>113</sup>

Cohn feels at home in nature, because there everything continues to grow and bloom, according to the seasons. This is stimulating and shows that in nature, life goes on; there is still a kind of normalcy, whereas in the city, it seems as if life is only becoming ever worse.<sup>114</sup>

When he is in these rural areas, he is reminded of the past and can forget his situation for a while. He describes things that seem to stem from another world (banks without signs barring Jews, the absence of swastikas, etc.). Sometimes he takes home a bouquet of wildflowers,<sup>115</sup> so as to create this peaceful feeling at home. Over the years, Cohn and his family learn to be modest with what they still have and can do: whereas they used to make excursions throughout the country, they are now satisfied “when one is allowed to breathe in the forest of Deutsch-Lissa and for the child, it is something big! Such is life.”<sup>116</sup> It is

clear that there is a tension between, on one hand, the city and its urban places and, on the other, the rural places. In the latter, and certainly in the forest, it is quiet and peaceful. Cohn feels keenly close to nature, where he smells the scent of corn and of soil. These are among the last open spaces that seem like a refuge for him, places to which he feels completely related. He describes and experiences nature and the rural areas as neutral or as more positive places. This also indicates that there remain at least some positive places in the country despite the terrible events unfolding. These (rural) places around Breslau have an important function for Cohn: they still represent positive experiences with his former homeland and thereby enable him to legitimize his former roots (Lichtblau 105).

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that “home” is a multi-layered phenomenon and that the concept undergoes dramatic changes in a world marked by persecutions, conflicts and war. Conflict and war can change places not only by devastating them in a physical-material way, but also by influencing how people move within them, which paths and directions they take, which places they try to avoid, where they dwell, where they feel threatened and where they feel safe or at home<sup>117</sup> (Beck 12). People who once used to feel deeply connected with their country, for example, now suddenly find that they have become a stranger there and feel “homeless at home.”

In the case of Cohn, we can observe a shrinking of the concept “home”: initially, Cohn feels at home everywhere in Germany and certainly in Silesia and his native city of Breslau; soon, however, all of this becomes reduced to the rural areas and ever more so to secluded places such as the synagogue, cemetery, library and private house.<sup>118</sup> In this way, Cohn’s environment collapses into little “islands” where he retains a feeling of home, surrounded by a hostile external world (see also Beck 23). In the end, even familiar places have become life-threatening; even the most private sites, such as his house, no longer offer any protection. Nazi policy transforms the territory under its control into a highly dangerous area for those of Jewish origin, whose background now plays a threatening role everywhere (Lichtblau 103). This is a key reason why Cohn now focuses more on his own Jewish religion and becomes acquainted with Zionism. After his first trip to Palestine, however, he realizes that it could never become his new home. This is in varying degrees due to private conflicts with his wife, to him having an incomplete perspective of living there and to the country not completely corresponding to his expectations. In this context, his keeping of a diary becomes

increasingly important: by writing, he is able to construct an imagined home. Cohn, in his writing but also in certain practices and habits (such as attending religious services) is able to recall the feeling of home. As Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (27) explain: “home comes to be found far more usually in a routine set of practices, in a repetition of habitual social interactions, in the ritual of a regularly used personal name.” People always long for stability, certainly in a world that is often alienating (Wright 223) and these practices seem to offer this stability.<sup>119</sup>

Home can be defined in multiple ways: it can be related to place, haven, family, practice, feeling, etc.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, one could say that home can be found in real manifestations – consider the places mentioned above, for example – but also in imaginary manifestations, as Minh-ha (16) notes: “the true home is to be found not in houses but in writing.” This certainly characterizes Cohn’s writings: when writing, he creates his own imaginary home, a place where memory and nostalgia are critically important.

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<sup>1</sup> Cohn, December 22, 1938, p. 571.

All English quotes have been translated by the author. Italics have been added for emphasis (note: Yiddish/Hebrew words are in italics in the original publication of the diaries and are retained here).

<sup>2</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of conceptions of home, see Mallett, Shelley. 'Understanding home: a critical review of the literature.' *The Sociological Review*, 2004, pp. 62-89.

<sup>3</sup> The diaries have been translated into English by Kenneth Kronenberg in 2012: Cohn, Willy, edited by Norbert Conrads, Translated by Kenneth Kronenberg, *No Justice in Germany. The Breslau Diaries, 1933-1941*. Stanford University Press, 2012. However, this work translates only half the diary notes.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance the following sources: Laqueur Walter. 'Three Witnesses: The Legacy of Viktor Klemperer, Willy Cohn, and Richard Koch.' *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10 (1996): 252-266; Walch, Teresa. 'Review of Cohn, Willy; Conrads, Norbert, ed., *No Justice in Germany: The Breslau Diaries, 1933-1941*.' *H-German, H-Net Reviews*. October, 2014. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/reviews/49785/walch-cohn-and-conrads-no-justice-germany-breslau-diaries-1933-1941> [Consulted on November 6, 2017].

<sup>5</sup> I want to thank Tamar Cohn Gazit, the granddaughter of Willy Cohn, who told me the story of how the diaries survived. More information can be found in Corden, Warner Max. *Lucky Boy in the Lucky Country: The Autobiography of Max Corden, Economist*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 27-40.

<sup>6</sup> November 25, 1934, p. 183.

<sup>7</sup> July 1, 1934, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> September 5, 1934, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> This imagery is repeatedly used, see also the following entries: January 30, 1933, p. 6; August 10, 1933, p. 67; November 7, 1938, p. 534; November 13, 1938, p. 541; December 17, 1938, p. 568; February 28, 1939, p. 608; March 15, 1939, p. 615.

<sup>10</sup> August 6, 1933, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Breslau was the first city to put into operation a sample system of Reichslautsprecher Säulen. (Note by Conrad in Cohn, p. 764).

<sup>12</sup> Tausk, December 11, 1938, p. 207.

<sup>13</sup> September 18, 1939, p. 694.

<sup>14</sup> December 31, 1933, p. 118; November 4, 1934, p. 174; September 27, 1936, p. 359.

<sup>15</sup> December 25, 1933, p. 116; November 29, 1937, p. 494.

<sup>16</sup> July 17, 1935, p. 253.

<sup>17</sup> November 20, 1938, p. 550.

<sup>18</sup> March 17, 1940, p. 768.

<sup>19</sup> December 3, 1940, p. 876.

<sup>20</sup> November 23, 1938, p. 553.

<sup>21</sup> December 31, 1938, p. 578.

<sup>22</sup> July 7, 1940, pp. 816-817.

<sup>23</sup> June 16, 1941, p. 809.

<sup>24</sup> I would like to thank Norbert Conrads, who noted this during a discussion at the workshop “Topographie der Shoah: Breslau/Wrocław 1933-1949” on April 9, 2019 in Dresden.

<sup>25</sup> One could say that Germany is his *Heimat*, but also a place where he feels alone at the same time.

<sup>26</sup> April 28, 1935, p. 219.

<sup>27</sup> December 3, 1938, p. 560.

<sup>28</sup> August 23, 1940, p. 835.

<sup>29</sup> July 30, 1941, p. 961.

Cadars and Courtade (quoted in Lee and Wilke 24) write the following about Eichendorff: “Mais le film retrouve aussi la douceur et la fluidité du lyrisme d’Eichendorff, ce poète romantique dont les strophes peuplent toujours anthologies et manuels et qui fut sans doute le plus grand amoureux des arbres de toute l’histoire allemande.” Cohn also loved nature, see the part “Home and Nature.”

<sup>30</sup> August 2, 1941, pp. 962-963.

<sup>31</sup> October 5, 1941, p. 989.

<sup>32</sup> January 30, 1940, p. 747-748.

<sup>33</sup> Another example of when he refers to literature: he is reminded of the text “Hadubrand and Hildebrand” when he thinks of the situation between him and his oldest son, Wölfl.

<sup>34</sup> April 27, 1937, p. 427.

<sup>35</sup> In the midst of the 1930’s, he also could save Ruth by sending her first to Denmark. Later, she also made it to Palestine.

<sup>36</sup> See for instance: March 26, 1937, p. 392.

<sup>37</sup> See also the following entry he wrote in Palestine: “There are more acquaintances here than in Breslau. [...] The longer you are here, the less you can see that there are still Jews who do not regard *Erez Israel* as a solution to the Jewish question” (April 19, 1937, p. 422). See also in this context: October 23, 1937, p. 482.

<sup>38</sup> September 14, 1935, p. 275.

<sup>39</sup> February 24, 1933, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> In considering this, it becomes more understandable why he sometimes writes the following: “That the German people need living space can be understood, and if one had granted them this living space, they would never have come to this opposition to the Jews in Germany” (January 31, 1939, p. 597). This can be understood as he also strives for space for the Jews and sees how the Germans have been doing this.

<sup>41</sup> See also: March 20, 1937, p. 387.

<sup>42</sup> March 22, 1937, p. 388.

- <sup>43</sup> March 12, 1937, p. 384, my emphasis.
- <sup>44</sup> See for instance the following diary entry: March 20, 1937, p. 387.
- <sup>45</sup> March 21, 1937, p. 388.
- <sup>46</sup> March 23, 1937, p. 389, my emphasis.
- <sup>47</sup> April 25, 1939, p. 635.
- <sup>48</sup> March 26, 1937, pp. 392-393.
- <sup>49</sup> March 22, 1937, p. 388.
- <sup>50</sup> Konzett, Matthias. 'Walther von der Vogelweide.' *Encyclopedia of German Literature*. First edition. London, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000, p. 977.
- <sup>51</sup> March 30, 1937, p. 397.
- <sup>52</sup> March 30, 1937, p. 397.
- <sup>53</sup> April 1, 1937, p. 400.
- <sup>54</sup> May 31, 1935, p. 234.
- <sup>55</sup> April 1, 1937, p. 400.
- <sup>56</sup> See also: April 20, 1937, p. 423; March 12, 1938, p. 523.
- <sup>57</sup> March 29, 1937, p. 395.
- <sup>58</sup> April 7, 1937, p. 410.
- <sup>59</sup> March 29, 1937, p. 396. See also: April 18, 1937, p. 421.
- <sup>60</sup> See also the following entry: "from the top of the Skopus the view of Jerusalem, that which I longed for; even if one did not know all the individual buildings, one had a picture in the soul, the Dome of the Rock in the Temple Square, the old glory of our people. [...] But today I can say I have found something of the Jerusalem of my heart [this sentence is underlined in the original text!]. The whole situation is that of a great tension, no one knows what the next day brings; but we will and must be able to (re)build. And what is not today must be done tomorrow" (April 13, 1937, pp. 415-416).
- <sup>61</sup> April 14, 1937, p. 417.
- <sup>62</sup> April 14, 1937, p. 418.
- <sup>63</sup> April 21, 1937, p. 423.
- <sup>64</sup> "On board of the 'Champollion,' Thursday. It was very hard for me last night, when the steamer slowly slipped out of the port of Haifa. One goes from a country with which one feels deeply connected!" (April 29, 1937, p. 428).
- <sup>65</sup> April 21, 1937, p. 423.
- <sup>66</sup> See also: March 26, 1937, p. 392.
- <sup>67</sup> March 31, 1937, p. 397.
- <sup>68</sup> See for instance: April 15, 1937, p. 418.
- <sup>69</sup> See for instance: April 23, 1937, p. 424; April 24, 1937, p. 425.
- <sup>70</sup> April 12, 1937, p. 414-415.

<sup>71</sup> April 13, 1937, p. 416.

<sup>72</sup> See for instance March 31, 1937, p. 398; April 2, 1937, p. 402.

<sup>73</sup> See also: April 9, 1937, p. 411.

<sup>74</sup> April 7, 1937, p. 410.

<sup>75</sup> May 14, 1937, p. 432.

<sup>76</sup> The fact that writings become highly important can also be read from the following entry: “The debate with this book gives me strength and rest” (May 3, 1937, p. 430).

<sup>77</sup> December 31, 1937, p. 503.

<sup>78</sup> December 3, 1938, p. 560.

<sup>79</sup> October 20, 1935, p. 289.

<sup>80</sup> June 24, 1933, p. 55.

<sup>81</sup> I mention only the places he visits the most, but there are also other places where he prays, such as the “Vorwärts” (September 7, 1933, p. 74), Mozartsaal (September 22, 1933, p. 79), etc.

<sup>82</sup> May 24, 1941, p. 939.

<sup>83</sup> See also Berger 64 (quoted in Rapport and Dawson 7): “[...] home comes to be found in a routine set of practices, a repetition of habitual interactions, in styles of dress and address, in memories and myths, in stories carried around in one’s head. People are more at home nowadays, in short, in ‘words, jokes, opinions, gestures, actions, even the way one wears a hat.’”

<sup>84</sup> April 14, 1937, p. 417.

<sup>85</sup> March 22, 1936, pp. 314-315.

<sup>86</sup> October 2, 1940, pp. 854-855.

<sup>87</sup> March 30, 1941, p. 920.

<sup>88</sup> See for example: September 5, 1940, p. 840; November 2, 1941, p. 1001.

<sup>89</sup> The fact that he feels at home in a scientific atmosphere also becomes clear when he is in Palestine, when he suddenly comes in contact with Moss Calvary: “Moss Calvary, a name that has played a role in Zionist writings for years; I imagined him, and he knew at once who I was, he was 61 years old and very ardent, still wandering with his backpack. I told him about his books, which he described as ‘youth sins.’ Giwath Brenner is always a point of attraction for spiritual people [...]” (April 9, 1937, p. 411).

<sup>90</sup> January 15, 1939, p. 586.

<sup>91</sup> March 21, 1941, p. 918.

<sup>92</sup> June 1, 1939, p. 650.

<sup>93</sup> November 8, 1940, p. 867.

<sup>94</sup> January 17, 1941, pp. 891-892.

<sup>95</sup> May 5, 1941, pp. 932-933.

<sup>96</sup> June 16, 1941, p. 947.

<sup>97</sup> June 13, 1941, p. 946.

<sup>98</sup> April 20, 1935, p. 216.

<sup>99</sup> May 8, 1940, p. 791.

<sup>100</sup> October 2, 1940, p. 854.

<sup>101</sup> March 5, 1941, p. 911.

<sup>102</sup> December 25, 1940, p. 883-884.

<sup>103</sup> From 1941 on, Cohn notes regularly that there are lists with names of people to be deported to Tormersdorf. See for instance August 20, 1941, p. 970; September 27, 1941, p. 985; October 16, 1941, p. 993.

<sup>104</sup> August 29, 1941, p. 974.

<sup>105</sup> November 1, 1941, p. 1001.

<sup>106</sup> May 12, 1940, p. 793.

<sup>107</sup> July 7, 1940, p. 816-817.

<sup>108</sup> See for instance: July 23, 1939, p. 666; October 1, 1939, p. 701; May 5, 1940, p. 790; June 20, 1940, p. 810; June 26, 1940, p. 813.

<sup>109</sup> August 4, 1940, p. 824.

<sup>110</sup> June 3, 1941, p. 943.

<sup>111</sup> December 25, 1934, p. 193.

<sup>112</sup> April 1, 1937, p. 400.

<sup>113</sup> April 3, 1937, p. 403.

<sup>114</sup> Many people also committed suicide, etc.

<sup>115</sup> July 11, 1937, p. 448.

<sup>116</sup> October 10, 1940, p. 857.

<sup>117</sup> We can say that home and the way of living are under threat.

<sup>118</sup> That these places merit important place in Cohn's life is also shown by the fact that he seeks for similar places in other countries, like Paris and Palestine.

<sup>119</sup> In other words: "home" is a kind of work in progress, a project in which one is constantly adding corrections, improvements, etc.

<sup>120</sup> "Home" can also be related to music, one's closest friends, etc.

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